



Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
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# Johnston Senior High School

JOHNSTON

## THE SALT VISIT TEAM REPORT

October 21, 2005



### **School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)**

**The school accountability program of the Rhode Island Department of Education**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## **The Purpose and Limits of This Report**

This is the report of the SALT team that visited Johnston Senior High School from October 17 to October 21, 2005.

The SALT visit report makes every effort to provide your school with a valid, specific picture of how well your students are learning. The report also portrays how the teaching in your school affects learning and how the school supports learning and teaching and how the district's support for school leadership affects the school. The purpose of developing this information is to help you make changes in teaching and the school that will improve the learning of your students. The report is valid because the team's inquiry is governed by a protocol that is designed to make it possible for visit team members to make careful judgments using accurate evidence. The exercise of professional judgment makes the findings useful for school improvement because these judgments identify where the visit team thinks the school is doing well and where it is doing less well.

The major questions the team addressed were:

How well do students learn at Johnston Senior High School?

How well does the teaching at Johnston Senior High School affect learning?

How well does Johnston Senior High School support learning and teaching?

How well does the district support school leadership?

The following features of this visit are at the heart of the report:

Members of the visit team are primarily teachers and administrators from Rhode Island public schools. The majority of team members are teachers. The names and affiliations of the team members are listed at the end of the report.

The team sought to capture what makes this school work, or not work, as a public institution of learning. Each school is unique, and the team has tried to capture what makes Johnston Senior High School distinct.

The team did not compare this school to any other school.

When writing the report, the team deliberately chose words that it thought would best convey its message to the school, based on careful consideration of what it had learned about the school.

**The team reached consensus on each conclusion, each recommendation and each commendation in this report.**

The team made its judgment explicit.

This report reflects only the week in the life of the school that was observed and considered by this team. The report is not based on what the school plans to do in the future or on what it has done in the past.

This school visit is supported by the Rhode Island Department of Education as a component of School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT). To gain the full advantages of a peer visiting system, RIDE deliberately did not participate in the editing of this SALT visit report. That was carried out by the team's chair with the support of Catalpa Ltd.

The team closely followed a rigorous protocol of inquiry that is rooted in and consistent with *Practice-based Inquiry*® (Catalpa Ltd). The detailed *Handbook for Chairs of the SALT School Visit, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* describes the theoretical constructs behind the SALT visit and stipulates the many details of the visit procedures.

Modest refinements were made to this protocol of this visit before the visit to take into better account the unusual circumstances facing the school at the time of the visit. The most pressing of these events is the upcoming submission by the school to the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) to "show cause" as to why NEASC should **not** lift the school's accreditation. NEASC had placed the school on probation following its 2000 team evaluation of the school.

These unusual circumstances placed the SALT visit team in a position different from what is usual for a SALT visit team. As a result RIDE and Catalpa Ltd. agreed to a set of minor modifications in the SALT visit protocol. These differences were discussed with the team chair, RIDE, the leadership of the school before the visit. They are contained in the October 10, 2005 Catalpa Ltd. memo, *Revisions in Protocol for Johnston High School SALT visit*.

While RIDE and NEASC cooperate to assure effectiveness, they are completely separate and independent agencies, each with well developed procedures for carrying out their work. NEASC may or may not use the SALT visit reports in making its decision regarding Johnston High School accreditation. The SALT visit process and this report are not tied to NEASC in any official way. The school may use this report as it may use any other report or evidence to support its position with NEASC, if it so chooses, but that does not imply that either the SALT team, or the SALT project office or RIDE see this report as carrying a status that is different in regard to NEASC than that of any other SALT visit report.

The *Handbook*, the *Revisions* memo and other relevant documents are available at [www.Catalpa.org](http://www.Catalpa.org). Contact Rick Richards at (401) 222-8401 or [rick.richards@ride.ri.gov](mailto:rick.richards@ride.ri.gov) for further information about the SALT visit protocol. The memo that delineates the modifications is also available.

SALT visits undergo rigorous quality control. Catalpa Ltd. monitors each visit and determines whether the report can be endorsed. Endorsement assures the reader that the team and the school followed the visit protocol. It also ensures that the conclusions and the report meet specified standards.

## Sources of Evidence

The Sources of Evidence that this team used to support its conclusions are listed in the appendix.

The team spent a total of over 159.75 hours in direct classroom observation. Most of this time was spent observing complete lessons or classes. Almost every classroom was visited at least once, and almost every teacher was observed more than once. In addition, the team spent a total of over 80.5 hours interviewing administration, faculty, and staff.

The full visit team built the conclusions, commendations and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussion. The team met for a total of 34.5 hours in team meetings spanning the five days of the visit. This time does not include the time the team spent in classrooms, with teachers, and in meetings with students, parents, and school and district administrators.

The team did agree by consensus that every conclusion in this report is:

Important enough to include in the report

Supported by the evidence the team gathered during the visit

Set in the present, and

Contains the judgment of the team

## Using the Report

This report is designed to have value to all audiences concerned with how Johnston Senior High School can improve student learning. However, the most important audience is the school itself.

How your school improvement team reads and considers the report is the critical first step. RIDE will provide a SALT Fellow to lead a follow-up session with the school improvement team to help start the process. With support from the Johnston District School Improvement Coordinator and from SALT fellows, the school improvement team should carefully decide what changes it wants to make in learning, teaching and the school and how it can amend its School Improvement Plan to reflect these decisions.

The Johnston District, RIDE and the public should consider what the report says or implies about how they can best support Johnston Senior High School as it works to strengthen its performance.

Any reader of this report should consider the report as a whole. A reader who only looks at recommendations misses important information.

## 2. PROFILE OF JOHNSTON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Johnston High School, located in Johnston, Rhode Island, serves students in grades nine through twelve. The school was built in a field across the street from the junior-senior high school (now the middle school) that was operating at overcapacity on split sessions in 1968. The high school's physical plant has not received any additions in its thirty-seven year history, and its original boilers are in place and still operating. The library, which had vaulted ceilings in its center, now has been reconfigured to a one story facility to create additional space on the second floor for a computer lab.

Of the 903 students in the high school, two percent are Asian, three percent are African-American, eight percent are Hispanic, and eighty-seven percent are white. The student population comprises forty-nine percent girls and fifty-one percent boys. Of these students, 251 are freshmen, 260 are sophomores, 185 are juniors, and 170 are seniors. Nine percent of the students receive free and/or reduced price lunch and breakfast, and nineteen percent have Individualized Educational Plans.

The Johnston High School faculty includes one principal, one assistant principal, two administrative deans, 63 classroom teachers, 10 resource teachers, two self-contained teachers, a transition coordinator, two literacy teachers, a part-time adaptive physical education teacher, four counselors, a librarian, a nurse-teacher, a social worker, a psychologist, two half-time co-athletic directors, nine teacher aides, and a part-time site-based coordinator. The staff includes six clerks, seven custodians, and seven full- and part-time cafeteria employees.

To implement the state's initiatives for high school reform, Johnston High School has recently made a number of changes in scheduling and grouping students. These include increasing the total daily minutes of class time for all students, eliminating study halls, and providing teachers with fifty-one minutes per week of common planning time. Sophomores, who continue to read one or two years below grade-level, participate in a two-credit literacy ramp-up class. Freshmen, who read one or two years below grade level, based on their eighth grade reading data, are placed in a Literacy I ramp-up class. Reading is taught as a pull-out class to freshmen, sophomores and juniors who are reading three or more grades below level. A team consisting of the lead literacy coach and the reading, English and special education teachers meets in the spring to plan current placements for freshman, sophomores and juniors who read below grade level and to prepare Personalized Literacy Plans for students, as appropriate.

Beginning with the Class of 2008, graduation requirements will change. All students must earn 22 Carnegie units and successfully exhibit a quality portfolio. Many teachers, including all department chairpersons, have received training in digital portfolios, task development and task scoring. Certificates of Initial Mastery tasks in English language arts and math are completed by all freshmen and scored by their teachers. A pilot capstone class is being offered for the first time in 2005-2006.

Advisories were implemented for freshmen in January 2005. Due to scheduling conflicts that developed, they are not currently available. The school plans to revive them for freshman and sophomores with the start of the second semester in January 2006. All freshmen are in freshmen houses that comprise approximately 90 students and at least one teacher in each of these subjects: English, math, social studies, science and special education.



The Johnston High School Academic Decathlon Team regularly places second each year in the statewide competition. A National Academy of Finance Program is in its first year of operation at Johnston High School. High School students and staff annually donate personal items, blood and cash to the Rhode Island National Guard, the Red Cross, the Girl Scouts of America and the Tomorrow Fund.

### **3. PORTRAIT OF JOHNSTON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT**

Johnston High School is a warm, friendly, and well-maintained school. Students, faculty, staff, school and district administrators, school committee representatives and community members all convey a solid sense of pride and loyalty to their school. A proud history and strong traditions clearly signal the vital place Johnston High School plays within the community.

The students take pride in their school, respect their teachers, and value and understand the importance of a good education. Camaraderie among students is evident in the accepting and respectful way they interact with one another. Students place great trust in their school and teachers to equip them with necessary knowledge, skills and strategies for success.

The faculty and staff and the school and district administrators work hard to fulfill this trust. Together with the students, they comprise a close-knit community that likens itself to an extended family. They are dedicated and spirited individuals who respect and value their students and celebrate their many academic, artistic and athletic successes.

While this community pride and sense of accomplishment swarms through the home of the Johnston Panthers, an important issue remains prominent — the trust the students place in the school and district is not always honored. Although the instruction and programs that are provided to the students, with notable exceptions, are adequate for a basic education, they do not consistently challenge students at all levels of performance or hold them to the highest expectations.

Many other issues further beset the school and the district. The impending termination hearing for membership in the New England Association of Schools and Colleges and the upcoming Peer and Commissioner's Reviews for proficiency-based graduation being the most prominent. The school and the district have initiated reforms. The most important is the work to establish an appropriate chain of command. Other changes in the works include revising and developing the curriculum, altering the school structure and schedule and improving discipline and school climate. More work in all of these areas remains, and an increased acceptance of collective responsibility is needed for continued improvement.

Despite the tenuous and initial nature of these improvement efforts, the school and district appear poised to follow through on the potential of the work they have begun. The coming together of the school and district leadership and their avowed support for students and teachers holds promise that Johnston High School will deliver on its mission to offer "rigorous and dynamic programs which challenge all students to achieve high standards, become life-long learners and lead self-fulfilling, productive lives."

## 4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

### Conclusions

Students write often and in most disciplines, producing works that range in quality from unsatisfactory to exceptional. Most students write at a basic level with appropriate ideas, sentence structure and conventions. Students say that school-wide and task specific writing rubrics are tools that help them understand teacher expectations. These students write rough drafts, personal journals and short answer responses, but they do not consistently produce finished pieces that demonstrate reflection, revision and multiple drafts. Only some students can produce written pieces that show sophistication, style and the extended development of ideas. This is consistent with the 2005 New Standards Reference Examination results in which only thirty-seven percent of students achieved the standard in the area of writing effectiveness. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students and teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, 2005 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries)*

Students at this school value reading and say that it is important to them and their futures. Most are prepared with materials for class and, when it is time to read, they are proud to discuss their reading and are willing to write or share their ideas. Students read a variety of genres for classroom and home assignments, and this helps them practice and improve their reading. Most students read effectively for basic understanding and to obtain specific information from text, yet some have difficulty grasping and analyzing concepts from the text. While they can easily underline the main idea and recall facts, many do not demonstrate the ability to respond in class discussions beyond a literal understanding to engage or develop the 'why' questions. This is reflected in the fact that only thirty-five percent of students achieved the standard for reading analysis and interpretation on the 2005 New Standards Reference Examination. Importantly, students identified as struggling readers improve their reading skills by learning and practicing in literacy ramp-up and intensive reading classes. Students in these classes learn how to decode and use comprehension strategies, as well as how to monitor their own reading. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students and teachers, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing district and school policies and practices, 2005 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries)*

Students solve problems of varying degrees of complexity in many classes across all disciplines. Students typically approach problem solving as a procedure in which they follow models or practice prior skills. They solve routine problems well when they identify cause and effect, calculate using formulae, compare and contrast information, and gather and organize data. As such, students recall, understand and use information to solve basic problems. However, most students seldom grapple with ideas, analyze, synthesize and/or interpret complex problems or evaluate their work. They do not approach problem solving as a process in which they generalize patterns, critically analyze themes or independently revise their work. Consequently, much of the work they do is not at a proficient level. In addition to the evidence provided by classroom work, the 2005 New Standards Reference Examination Scores in which only nineteen percent of students achieved or achieved the standard with honors reflects this. Low scores in the reading analysis and interpretation subtest cited above further support this. *(following students, observing classes, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, 2004 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries, talking with students and teachers, discussing student work with teachers)*

Students care about their learning and value their education. They respect their teachers, seek them out for extra help and trust in the instructional decisions they make. Students perceive their work as rigorous and, when asked, describe it as challenging. However, the SALT team concludes that the majority of student work is neither rigorous nor challenging. Student work generally lacks higher level thinking skills, critical analysis, depth and authentic application. We concur with the NEASC Report of 2000, which was reiterated in the July 2005 NEASC letter, which states that their work reflects “the absence of academic rigor of the curriculum for all students.” *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, talking with students, teachers, parents and school and district administrators, reviewing classroom assessments, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing district and school policies and practices, NEASC Report of the Visiting Committee to Johnston High School, May 2000, July 18, 2005 NEASC Letter)*

Johnston High School students are exceptionally well mannered, personable, and respectful of the entire school community. They have great pride in their school as a ‘flagship’ for the community. They say that the school is like an extended family, and they are genuinely loyal to one another. They demonstrate positive interpersonal skills in their mature and articulate conversations with adults, their acceptance of diversity and their interactions with their peers. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, parents, school and district administrators, local signs supporting Johnston High School)*

**Important Thematic Findings in Student Learning**

Students:

- ◆ *Care about their learning and value their education*
- ◆ *Have great pride in their school and respect for their teachers*
- ◆ *Write at a basic level, read effectively for basic understanding and solve routine problems*
- ◆ *Seldom engage in higher level thinking and critical analysis*
- ◆ *Come to class ready and prepared to learn*

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING FOR LEARNING

### Conclusions

Teachers in all disciplines provide opportunities for students to write. However, there is not a school-wide emphasis on the teaching of writing. While some teachers teach students to write well by providing direct instruction, requiring students to revise their work and having high expectations, others do not. Many teachers in all content areas do not provide regular and explicit instruction in how to write nor do they provide consistent and useful feedback beyond a rubric score to help students improve their work. Too few teachers provide benchmark papers, model good writing, discuss writing and critique student work. This approach to the teaching of writing does not promote sophisticated writing. In fact, this may be why fifty percent of Johnston High School students nearly achieved the standard in the writing effectiveness subtest of the 2005 New Standards Reference Examination. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students and teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing classroom assessments, 2005 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries, reviewing district and school policies and practices)*

Teachers provide ample opportunities for students to practice reading across all disciplines, and they encourage students to read. This helps students meet the school-wide twenty-five-book campaign to become better readers. They teach students to read for basic understanding by discussing reading in classes, assigning reading guides and having students read both silently and aloud. Teachers say this helps students increase their comprehension and meet school-wide expectations for reading. However, many teachers do not deliberately or systematically teach the skills necessary for students to improve their reading as stated in the school improvement plan. Their expectations for student reading are inconsistent; they accept below-standard reading as proficient. Therefore, they do not prepare students to be proficient or critical readers. *(following students, observing classes, meeting with school administrators and parents, talking with students and teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing school improvement plan, 2005 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries, reviewing district and school policies and practices)*

Teachers in most content areas provide students with opportunities to solve problems. Some teachers provide challenging problem solving activities that engage students and encourage them to apply prior knowledge to new settings, promote persistence and foster originality. However, most teachers ask students to solve problems that require rote practice or simply to repeat steps and procedures that are already familiar to them. Students solve these problems often and well. Teachers far less frequently challenge students to grapple and persist with difficult problems. Furthermore, not enough teachers model problem solving strategies, provide benchmarks, use rubrics as more than checklists or provide meaningful feedback to help students reflect upon and improve their work. *(following students observing classes, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, 2005 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries, reviewing district and school policies and practices)*

Most teachers work hard and relate well to their students. Some teachers design student-centered lessons that specifically are matched to their students. They provide authentic lessons that challenge and engage their students, provide necessary supports for learning, and encourage students to think about their learning and to have clear and high expectations. These teachers provide instruction that allows students to say out loud in class, “Now I get it!” Other teachers are working to implement such student-centered lessons. While these lessons are not yet fully effective or appropriately rigorous, they do show promise and the teachers’ desire to improve and change their practice. However, too many teachers do not actively engage students, maximize the use of instructional time, have high expectations, vary their teaching to meet the needs of their students or provide clear purpose and connections between lessons. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing district and school policies and practices, Attributes and Actions of Teachers Whose Students Consistently Achieve)*

Teachers at Johnston High School are dedicated to their students and care about the school. They say that this is a great place to work, that the students are well behaved and respectful and that discipline is much improved. While they say past problems appear to be lessening, they remain concerned about the effect of local politics on the school, the school’s negative portrayal in the media, and the status of the school’s accreditation. The SALT Team sees the teachers as a team that works well together and that is led by a compassionate and skillful principal *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, school committee, and parents, talking with students, teachers, parents, and school administrators, discussing student work with teachers)*

**Commendations for Johnston Senior High School**

Ample opportunities for students to read and write

Dedicated teachers who care about the school and the students

**Recommendations for Johnston High School**

Raise expectations for student learning.

Increase the rigor of the curriculum to promote higher-level thinking.

Provide a clear purpose and connections between lessons.

Provide regular and explicit instruction in teaching writing.

Teach deliberately and systematically the skills necessary to improve reading.

Provide and model challenging problem solving opportunities that require students to grapple and persist.

Utilize instructional time more effectively and efficiently.

Provide examples of exemplary student work to guide student learning.

Utilize rubrics effectively, and provide meaningful feedback to guide the improvement of student learning.

**Recommendations for Johnston School Department**

Work with the teachers to implement the curriculum to integrate reading, writing and problem solving strategies in all content areas.

Work with the teachers to promote rigor and higher-level thinking throughout the curriculum.

Work with teachers to be accountable for teaching the curriculum to improve student learning.



## 6. FINDINGS ON SCHOOL SUPPORT FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

### Conclusions

Johnston High School has a proud culture and a warm climate. Students report that there are many opportunities for them to become involved in school and in co-curricular activities. They state that their school is like an extended family and that their teachers care about them. Several generations of families have attended this school, and alumni often participate in school traditions including homecoming weekend, drama productions and athletic events, thus showing the vital role Johnston High School plays within the community. Contrary to the July 2005 NEASC letter stating that there is “evidence of poor student discipline in the building,” the SALT team found otherwise. During the visit, students behaved appropriately in classrooms, hallways and the cafeteria. This appropriate behavior was particularly impressive during a ninety-minute school evacuation. *(following students, observing the school, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, parents, and school administrators, July 18, 2005 NEASC Letter)*

The Johnston High School leadership runs the school well and provides a safe and orderly environment for students to learn. The faculty and staff say that they support the principal and respect and appreciate her support. The current leadership structure including the principal, interim assistant principal, deans of discipline and department chairs form a cohesive and effective team. School-wide behavior, co-curricula activities, and daily operations and routines of the building run smoothly. Despite a recent history of frequent turnover in both the school and district administrations, school leadership now appears to be stable. This stability contributes to the improved school climate and morale. Challenges still confront the school leadership: the many initiatives that show a lack of focus and prioritization, the ongoing preparation to respond to NEASC, the efforts to implement strong programs to support proficiency-based graduation requirements, and the need to ensure the daily implementation of an effective and rigorous curriculum. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing district and school policies and practices)*

Johnston High School is preparing a Show-Cause Consideration to NEASC in response to the Commission's July 2005 letter that informed the school of its pending termination of accreditation. The school's response has been to gather data, to create a new leadership team, to compile and organize existing materials, to increase internal and external communication, and to reaffirm the roles and responsibilities of the school and district administrators. The school leadership team says that they have worked hard in conjunction with the district leadership to prepare their response. One accomplishment, for example, that has resulted from these efforts is in the area of school resources for learning. The implementation of the three-tiered literacy program already provides effective learning environments for struggling readers to learn. The math problem solving classes provide opportunities for students to develop and practice their problem-solving strategies. Another positive effort that has resulted from the NEASC response has been the increase in the number of department chairs, the institution of the deans for discipline, and the creation of the parent advisory committee. These changes are having a positive impact on the school. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, and school and district administrators, talking with school administrators, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing district and school policies and practices, July 18, 2005 NEASC Letter)*

Johnston High School has begun to meet the requirements of the Rhode Island High School Diploma System. This includes the establishment of common planning time, personal literacy plans, and multiple and varied assessments. While these efforts are works in progress, they help the school assist students to learn and achieve. The school has identified graduation portfolio and student exhibition as the means for evidence that students will use to demonstrate their proficiency for graduation. To help students meet these proficiency expectations, the school provides access and opportunity for all students to enroll in courses at all levels. The school has also created common tasks in many content areas as an effort, though incomplete, to help ensure that students have access and opportunity to an equally rigorous curriculum. While the school has developed school-wide rubrics, the SALT Team agrees with the NEASC statement: "the attempts to use the newly created school-wide rubrics have been rushed, many teachers do not understand their value or purpose, and inadequate professional development time has been committed to prepare teachers for this initiative." Further work remains to be done to meet these requirements. While Grade Span Expectations have been completed for English/language arts, they are not yet complete for mathematics. Also important and ongoing is the need to define what proficiency means and to provide a rationale for the quantity and quality of evidence that is sufficient for students to demonstrate their proficiency. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, parents, and school administrators, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing district and school policies and practices, July 18, 2005 NEASC Letter)*

Professional development opportunities at Johnston High School are offered at frequent intervals to all staff beyond the school day through the Professional Development Institute. A variety of topics are available to the teachers, and teacher requests for professional development of their choice are considered. This professional development format is not effective or adequate to help teachers meet the needs of students and provide consistent instruction. Given the number of initiatives simultaneously being implemented, there is no concentrated focus or alignment to curriculum and program needs that address the entire faculty on common and relative topics. We concur with the 2005 NEASC letter that “there is no plan for and little time for professional development which requires the entire staff.” Furthermore, there is little effort to evaluate the effectiveness of the school and district professional development efforts. *(following students, observing classes, talking with teachers, meeting with the school improvement team, school and district administrators, reviewing records of professional development activities, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing district and school policies and practices, July 18, 2005 NEASC Letter)*

The school and district leadership have worked together to create a curriculum template to standardize the written curriculum. This template has helped to ensure consistency of content and rigor across all content areas and at all levels of classes. However, the curriculum at Johnston High School is incomplete. The curriculum, as written, does not effectively align instruction with assessment or clearly articulate how it is implemented in the classroom to ensure that students are able to read, write or problem solve at high levels. As such, there are limited examples of student products that show evidence of high levels of critical thinking. This is consistent with NEASC’s assertion that the “curriculum remains insufficiently rigorous for the range of students in the school and the inadequate evidence of a curricula focus on depth over breadth and the application of knowledge.” *(following students, observing classes, meeting with the school improvement team, and school and district administrators, talking with teachers, school and administrators, reviewing district and school policies and practices, July 18, 2005 NEASC Letter)*

While the district and the community both are proud of their school, they fail to acknowledge the inconsistency between the high graduation rates, on one hand, and on the other, the low-test scores on the state assessments and below state average scores on the SATs. The school community does not identify classroom instruction and the lack of a rigorous curriculum as a cause for this situation. Rather than see the cause and effect relationship, they dismiss the results by saying that “students do not take the test seriously” or that scores will improve with the class of 2008, as those students will have been exposed to a consistent standards-based education. The inability to accept this responsibility contributes to a persistent pattern of low performance at Johnston High School. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, parents, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing district and school policies and practices)*

**Commendations for Johnston Senior High School**

Proud culture and warm climate

Numerous school and co-curricula activities

Three-tiered literacy program and math problem solving classes

Leadership restructuring

**Recommendations for Johnston Senior High School**

Focus initiatives to align with curriculum and program needs.

Work with the district to complete a curriculum that ensures consistency of content and rigor across all content areas and all levels of classes.

Use assessment to drive curriculum, instruction, assessment and professional development.

Complete the Rhode Island High School Diploma System requirements.

Improve the professional development delivery format.

Evaluate the effectiveness of the school and district professional development efforts.

**Recommendations for Johnston School District**

Work with the school to complete a curriculum that ensures consistency of content and rigor across all content areas and all levels of classes.

Work with the school to respond to low test scores with effective strategies to improve student performance.

Develop and implement a plan to support teaching and learning through effective professional development.

## 7. FINDINGS ON DISTRICT SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

### Conclusions

The school and district leadership have established a chain of command from the school committee to the district leadership to the school leadership. All say that this clarification and definition of roles and responsibilities has had a positive effect on the climate of both the school and the district and on the ability to manage the school. Previous reports indicate that this was not always the case, and it is well documented that confusion in the command structure seriously confused the mission and impeded the operation of the school. The SALT team sees this as a step in the right direction that clearly establishes the principal as the leader, who is able to manage the daily operations of the school and lead its educational mission. *(observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with teachers and school administrators, reviewing district strategic plan, reviewing district and school policies and practices)*

The Johnston School District is aware of the many expectations for improvement that confront this school. Together with the school, they are working to implement reforms such as the Institute for Learning, the Rhode Island Skills Commission and the school personalization program. The school and the district are in varying stages of implementing these initiatives with different degrees of success. The school does need additional help from the district to clarify and prioritize its focus among its many initiatives. Two areas that particularly need school and district focus are the school-wide curriculum and the response to the regulations for proficiency based graduation. While the school and the district have made initial efforts in both of these areas, the curriculum is neither complete nor adequately rigorous, and the response to the regulations for proficiency based graduation are at a beginning stage. *(observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, parents, and school administrators, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing district strategic plan, reviewing district and school policies and practices)*

Many challenges that confront the school and the district require a stronger professional development program to support and improve teaching and learning. The Professional Development Institute delivers professional development that does not focus on, or necessarily coincide with, school and district needs or assessment results necessary to produce systemic change, increase reflective practice or create a professional learning community. *(following students, observing classes, meeting with the school improvement team, and school and district administrators, talking with teachers and school administrators, reviewing district and school policies and practices, reviewing records of professional development activities)*

**Commendations for Johnston School District**

Clarification of the chain of command

Clearly establishing the principal as the leader of the school

Effort to implement reforms

**Recommendations for Johnston School District**

Prioritize and clarify the school and district focus.

Assist the school to revise and develop a complete and rigorous curriculum.

Align professional development with school and district initiatives and assessment results.

Explore more effective professional development delivery formats.

## 8. FINAL ADVICE TO JOHNSTON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

The mission statement of Johnston High School clearly sets a present direction for the school and the district, as well as a vision for the future. The school and the district have begun the work together to bring these words to life. Continued effort is required to make them a reality.

While maintaining your amazing sense of pride and genuine concern for your students, recognize that much more can be done to help them better learn and achieve. Remember, the most important gift a school and a school district can give its students is the means to reach their utmost potential. Johnston High School, in conjunction with the school district, must focus on improving student achievement through a rigorous and challenging curriculum for all students that is implemented effectively in all classes with equally high expectations for success.

While continuing to encourage students to be reflective about their work, also focus the administrators, faculty and staff to be reflective about their work and practice. Continue to use results of formal and informal assessments to inform and guide the instructional program and curricula decisions. Use the renewed strong morale of both the school and the district as a foundation to continue improvement efforts to provide students with the tools to meet increased expectations for success.

Continue the work to implement an effective program of support for the proficiency-based graduation requirements. Continue the work to respond to NEASC's concerns and recommendations. Examine current professional development practices and the potential they offer to help make necessary changes in practice. Develop ways to ensure that the current chain of command continues to be respected and followed appropriately. Use all of these challenges as opportunities from which to learn and build.

Johnston High School has the potential to be an excellent institution of learning. Now is the time to turn the words of the mission statement into reality. Make your ongoing and collaborative efforts to provide your students with the best education possible, the key to unlock "Rhode Island's best kept secret."

## ENDORSEMENT OF SALT VISIT TEAM REPORT

### Johnston Senior High School

October 21, 2005

Catalpa Ltd. monitors all SALT visits and examines each SALT visit team report to determine whether it should be endorsed as a legitimate SALT report. The endorsement decision is based on procedures and criteria specified in *Endorsing SALT Visit Team Reports*. (available on Catalpa website). Catalpa Ltd. bases its judgment about the legitimacy of a report on these three questions:

Did the SALT visit team and the host school conduct the visit in a manner that is reasonably consistent with the protocol for the visit?

Do the conclusions of the report meet the tests for conclusions specified in the visit protocol (important, accurate, set in present, shows the team's judgment)?

Does the report meet the tests for a report as specified in the visit protocol (fair, useful, and persuasive of productive action)?

Using the answers to these questions, the final decision to endorse the report answers the overall endorsement question: Is this a legitimate SALT team visit report? In order to make this determination, Catalpa weighs all the questions and issues that have been raised to decide whether a report is legitimate or not. While it is possible that a challenge related to one of the three questions listed above would be serious enough to withhold or condition the endorsement, it is more likely that issues serious enough to challenge a report's legitimacy will cut across the three questions.

While the SALT visit protocol requires that all SALT visits are conducted to an exceptionally high standard of rigor, visits are "real-life" events; it is impossible to control for all unexpected circumstances that might arise. The protocol for the conduct of the visit is spelled out in the *Handbook for SALT Visit Chairs, 1<sup>st</sup> edition*.

Since unexpected circumstances might result in either the team or the school straying too far from the protocol for a visit, Catalpa monitors both the school and the team during a visit regarding the conduct of the visit.

Most often actual visit events or issues do not challenge a report's legitimacy and Catalpa's monitoring and endorsement is routine. A district administrator, principal, faculty member or parent may not like a report, think it is too negative or that the visit should have been conducted in a manner that is not consistent with the protocol. None of these represent a challenge to a report's legitimacy; concerns that might challenge an endorsement are based on events that stray too far from the protocol.



The steps Catalpa completed for this review were:

Discussion with the chair, the school and the RIDE project director about issues related to the visit before it began.

Daily discussion with the visit chair about possible endorsement issues as they arose during the visit.

Observation of five portions of this visit.

Consideration of whether the pre-planned changes in the visit protocol had any negative impact on the report's legitimacy.

Consideration of whether the change in practice of one chair preparing the team and school and a second chair leading the actual visit had any negative impact on the report's legitimacy.

Discussion with the principal and the interim assistant principal at both the beginning and the end of the visit regarding any concerns they had about the visit.

Thorough review of the report in both its pre-release and final forms.

The findings from the review are:

1. This team was certified to meet team membership requirements set by RIDE staff.
2. This report was produced by a legitimate SALT Visit that was led by a trained SALT Visit Chair and conducted in a manner that is consistent with SALT Visit procedures.
3. Two issues were identified in the course of this visit that required special consideration. While they added a level of complexity to the work of the team, they had no influence on the legitimacy of either the conduct of the visit or the team's conclusions. The chair, the school and the team handled these issues with skill consistent with the basic principles for a legitimate visit and report.
4. The conclusions are legitimate SALT visit conclusions.
5. The report is a legitimate SALT visit report.

Accordingly, Catalpa Ltd. endorses this report.



Thomas A. Wilson, Ed.D.

Catalpa Ltd.

DATE: November 16, 2005

## REPORT APPENDIX

### Sources of Evidence for This Report

In order to write this report the team examined test scores, student work, and other documents related to this school. The school improvement plan for Johnston Senior High School was the touchstone document for the team. No matter how informative documents may be, however, there is no substitute for being at the school while it is in session—in the classrooms, in the lunchroom and in the hallways. The team built its conclusions primarily from information about what the students, staff and administrators think and do during their day. Thus, this visit allowed the team to build informed judgments about the teaching, learning and support that actually takes place at Johnston Senior High School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following sources of evidence:

- ◆ *observing classes directly*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *following 14 students for a full day*
- ◆ *observing the work of teachers and staff for a full day*
- ◆ *meeting at scheduled times with the following groups:*
  - teachers*
  - school improvement team*
  - school and district administrators*
  - students*
  - parents*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *analyzing state assessment results as reported in Information Works!*
- ◆ *reviewing the following documents:*
  - district and school policies and practices*
  - School documents, policies, and practices*
  - records of professional development activities*
  - classroom assessments*
  - school improvement plan for Johnston Senior High School*
  - district strategic plan*
  - 2004 SALT Survey report*
  - classroom textbooks*
  - local signage supporting Johnson High School*
  - Attributes and Actions of Teachers Whose Students Consistently Achieve*
  - 2004 Information Works!*

*2005 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries  
School and District Report Cards  
Johnston High School Departmental Philosophy, Standards, and  
Curriculum Guide  
July 18, 2005 NEASC Letter  
Report of the Visiting Committee, NEASC, May 7-10, 2000*

## **State Assessment Results for Johnston Senior High School**

Assessment results create sources of evidence that the visit team uses as it conducts its inquiry. The team uses this evidence to shape its efforts to locate critical issues about the school. It also uses this evidence, along with other evidence, to draw conclusions about those issues.

This school's results are from the latest available state assessment information. It is presented here in three different ways:

- ◆ *against performance standards,*
- ◆ *across student groups within the school, and*
- ◆ *over time.*

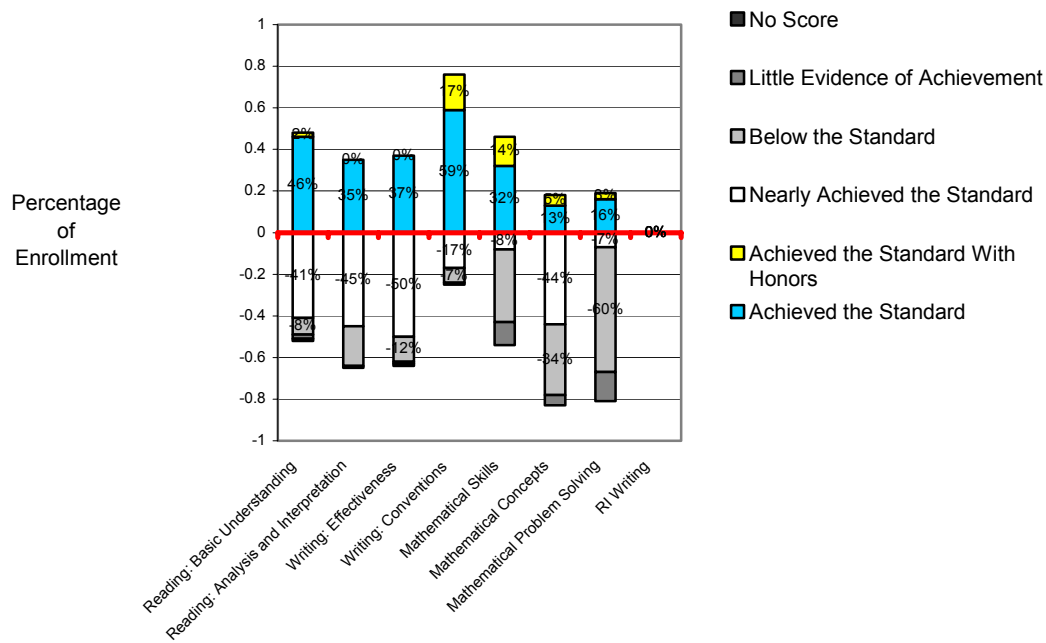
Information Works! data for Johnston Senior High School is available at [/www.infoworks.ride.uri.edu/2005/default.asp](http://www.infoworks.ride.uri.edu/2005/default.asp).

### **RESULTS IN RELATION TO PERFORMANCE STANDARDS**

The first display shows how well the students do in relation to standards in English/Language Arts and mathematics. Student results are shown as the percentage of students taking the test whose score places them in the various categories at, above, or below the performance standard. Endorsed by the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education in 1998, the tested standards can be found in the publication *New Standards Performance Standards*.

***Table1. 2003-04 Student Results on Rhode Island State Assessments***

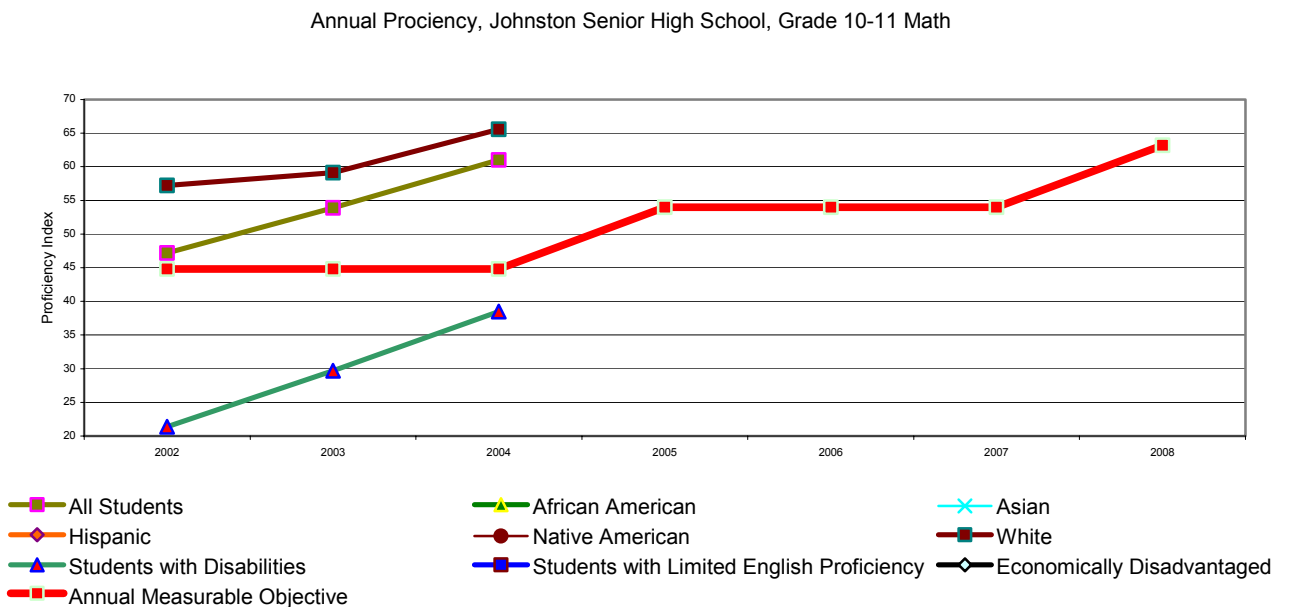
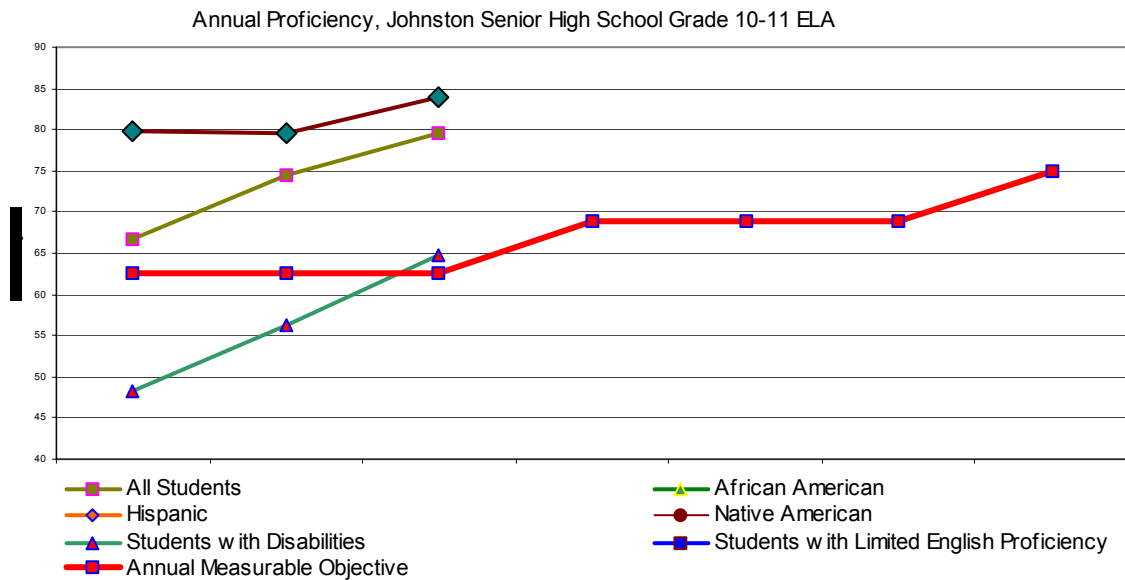
Johnston High School State Assessment Results of 2005



## RESULTS ACROSS STUDENT GROUPS WITHIN THE SCHOOL

An important way to display student results is across different groups of students in this school who have different characteristics. This display creates information about how well the school meets the learning needs of its various students, in accord with the federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation. To ensure that these smaller groups of students contain enough data to make results accurate, results are based on three years of testing. Any student group whose index scores do not meet targets set by RIDE, require additional attention to close its performance gap.

*Table 2 2002-2004 Student Results across Subgroups*



## REPORT CARD FOR JOHNSTON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

This Report Card shows the performance of Johnston Senior High School compared to the school's annual measurable objectives (AMO).

Index Proficiency Score, 2002-04	English Language Arts Target score: 62.6				MATHEMATICS Target score: 44.8			
Student Group	this School	Target Met?	this District	thE State	this School	Target Met?	this District	thE State
All Students	79.5	YES	79.2	79.2	61	YES	60.5	66
African Americans	*	YES	*	70.1	*	YES	*	48.1
Asian	*	YES	*	78.9	*	YES	*	64.3
Hispanic	*	YES	*	66.9	*	YES	*	48.3
Native Americans	*	YES	*	73.6	*	YES	*	56
White	84	YES	83.6	83.8	65.6	YES	65	72.4
Students with Disabilities	64.7	YES	63.1	61.5	38.5	YES†	36.3	43.9
Students with Limited English Proficiency	*	YES	*	53.4	*	YES	*	41.7
Students who are Economically Disadvantaged	*	YES	*	68.5	*	YES	*	50.1

PERCENT of students tested, 2002-04	Target: 95%			
	this school	target met?	THIS DISTRICT	the state
English Language Arts	95.4	YES	95.1	96.6
Mathematics	94.5	YES	94.4	96.6

Graduation Rate	Target: 71.4%			
	this school	target met?	THIS DISTRICT	the state
	89.9	YES	89.9	82.8

TARGETS MET/MISSED, THIS SCHOOL		
	TARGETS MET	TARGETS MISSED
English Language Arts Index Score	9	0
Mathematics Index Score	9	0
Percent Tested	2	0
Graduation Rate	1	0

this school is classified as:

**School in Need of Improvement/  
Making Progress**

KEY: \* Student group has too few students to calculate results.

† "Safe Harbor" - Student group has fallen short of the target but has made sufficient improvement over last year's score.

†† Student group has met the target based only on the most recent year of test results. NOTE: For information on targets and classifications, please see Quick Guide .

**THE JOHNSTON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM**

Cindy Vanner  
Chairperson  
Parent

Michaela Apice  
Faculty

Kristin Bekier  
Student

Robert Bertoncini  
Parent

David DeTora  
Parent

Dawn DeTora  
Parent

Kathy Kelly  
Faculty

Jarin LaFazia  
Student

Elizabeth Mantelli  
Administration

Kerri Murphy  
Faculty

Edward Saravo  
Faculty

Karen Shewcov  
Staff/Community

Jenna Zinno  
Student

**MEMBERS OF THE SALT VISIT TEAM**

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